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Editorial

Those who have visited post-revolutionary Iran may have seen that the staircases leading up to the national assembly and other public places have various flags woven into their carpets. These are the flags of the U.S.S.R., America and Israel, and the point of the exercise is that no one should enter the building without first treading underfoot the flags of these dreaded “enemies of Islam”. This is one of the “revolutionary changes” that has taken place in Iran since the theocratic coup of 1979.

This is just one example that gives us an idea of the nature of the religion favoured by modern exponents of Islam; it is a religion of hate. For them there is no task more noble than imposing disgrace and humiliation upon the so-called enemies of Islam.

When we look into the life of the Prophet of Islam and his companions, however, we find that their ways were quite different. In their longing to save people from eternal doom they used to offer up prayer upon prayer for the guidance of all, even their enemies. They would return the hate of others with love, in the hope that this would bring them closer to Islam. They made no attempt to humiliate even those who sought to humiliate them, for to have done so might have made ignorant bigotry well up in others' hearts. They even treated degenerate people with respect in the hope that this would revive their true natures, and make them realize that Islam belonged to them as well. This was the pattern set by the prophet and his companions, but the path followed by modern Muslim leaders is quite a different one.

There are plenty of people in the world today ready to hate others in the name of Islam, but no one prepared to love for the sake of his religion. There are plenty who take pride in their religion, but no one willing to bury his own pride, as true religion teaches one to do.

Yes, and there are plenty who are eager to trample the “enemies of Islam” underfoot, but is there anyone who will devote his life to the task of bringing those who have a mistaken concept of Islam closer to the religion of God? This is what *Al-Risala* is trying to do, and we invite those who really wish to serve Islam to join us.

3 January 1985

Death and the Beginning of a New Life

Of all moments that lie within the realm of human imagination and beyond, death is the most savage. All the other calamities that cause man distress are nothing compared to that which he will encounter in the form of death.

With death we enter the most difficult stage of our lives. We become totally powerless, destitute and helpless. All worldly suffering has a limit, but in the world that we will enter after death suffering and torment will be unlimited.

In reality, this is the state of man in the present world. So inherently weak is man that he cannot bear even the slightest inconvenience. Just the prick of a needle, a day's hunger and thirst, or a few nights' insomnia, are enough to rock his entire being. In this world, however, he has everything he needs. That is why he forgets his indigence, and remains blind to his own true nature.

In this world man has food and water, air and light; he is able to tame the forces of nature and bring civilization into existence. But if this world were taken away from him, then he would not be able to fashion another world of this kind anywhere in the universe. It would be his lot to wander around in darkness.

The worldly affliction which causes man distress on earth is trivial compared to the affliction of the hereafter. Worldly honour and ease make him proud and complacent, but they are of no consequence if they do not remain on into the next, eternal life. If man were to be conscious of what will become of him after death then he would forget about his worldly state, and concentrate on consolidating his position in the world where both repose and torment are infinite.

Death is not the end of life; it is the beginning of a new stage of life. It will lead some into a den of unmitigated hardship, and others to a world of infinite happiness.

3 January 1985

Skillful speaking is not a sign of wisdom

“A dog is not reckoned good because he barks well, and a man is not reckoned wise because he speaks skillfully.”

(Chuang Tzu)

In everything there is a Sign

Before the commencement of his prophetic mission, Moses, together with his wife and family, was traveling from Madyan when he came to Mount Sinai. A storm was blowing, and they had lost their way. Then, on the mountainside, Moses saw a fire, and said to his wife:

Stay here, for I can see a fire. Perchance I can bring you a lighted torch or find a guide hard by. (20: 10)

But when he came near, he found that there was much more in the 'Burning Bush' than met the eye:

...A voice called out to him: 'Moses, I am your Lord...' (Quran, 20:11-12)

The Lord then asked Moses what it was that he was holding in his right hand. Moses thought that it was no more than his staff: "Upon it I lean," he said, "and with it I bear down the leaves for my flock. It has other uses besides." But when Moses, at God's command, cast it down, it turned into a scurrying serpent. Similarly Moses' hand, when he put it under his armpit, came out shining white – another sign.

In ancient times the miracles were given to Prophets in order to convince people of their being true prophets. But in modern times Science can be used as substitute to miracles.

The revelation of the Qur'an, being the final book of God, marked the end of the prophetic era. After the Prophet Mohammad, unto whom the Quran was revealed, no other prophet would come to the world. That meant the end of miracles as the world had known them. But miracles provide a powerful incentive for faith; they are a living proof of the truth of the prophets' message; without them, many would miss the opportunity to get to know God. What would take their place? It was decided that human learning itself should encompass the miraculous properties invested in all things; knowledge of the inner significance of matter, which had hitherto been revealed unto prophets alone, should be made available to the whole of the human race.

The Quran made this advance in human learning possible by opening the way for human investigation into natural phenomena. The sun, moon, stars and other things that had previously been considered gods in themselves, were clearly stated to be the work of God, and signs of His singular power. When they were considered divine, these natural phenomena could not be investigated, for who can delve into the nature of "god"; but in their new context they became accessible to critical and objective study: that which had been an object of worship became an object of investigation.

This process was started by the Qur'an which stressed that everything in the universe was a sign of God. It culminated in the scientific revolution of recent times – the knowledge explosion which has exposed the inner significance of things. It is now possible for man, without the aid of prophetic miracles, to

perceive the miraculous nature of all things, and conclude that such feats of creation can only be the work of a masterful creator.

To take an example, a traveler visited the Red Sea, the scene of the most famous of Mosaic miracles - the parting of the waves. Armed with modern scientific equipment, he was able to observe the mass of colourful coral reefs, the dazzling array of glistening fish, and the elaborate marine growth that lay beneath its waters. Struck by the wondrous beauty he observed, he wrote:

At the Red Sea, it isn't necessary to behold the face of the Lord in the burning bush of Sinai or have the waves part for escape from the Pharaoh's chariots. One can prove the existence of God even by means of face-mask and a snorkel. For just below the surface is a seething, kaleidoscopic universe that could only be the creation of an omnipotent artist, an all-knowing scientist, a Supreme practical-joker. (Jeff Davidson in the *Readers Digest*, May, 1984.

Such observations have only been made possible by the advances of science, and science only advanced because the Quran made it possible for it to do so. If one observes the universe in depth, as science allows one to do, and draws conclusions in the light of Quranic teachings, then one will see that everything is a miracle; one will see the face of God shining in his creation.

5 January 1985

Broken homes caused by concept of individual freedom

Malik Saeed Hasan of Pakistan recently took a six-week trip to the United States. "Most young persons I came across," he wrote on return, "white or black, were divorced. Divorces spring from a sense of individual liberty, which makes individuals unable to accept any form of interference in their lives." (The Muslim, Islamabad, November 16, 1984).

Turning the Other Cheek

The corpse of a sixty year old man was found lying near Faiz Road in Delhi on July 31, 1984. It showed signs of brutal murder. Intensive investigations were carried out by the police but for a long time the dead body could not be identified. Finally the police managed to lay their hands on a clue. The shirt worn by the dead man bore the label of 'Azad Tailors' with the code no 52 on it. The police investigators now went to a small tailor's shop called 'Azad Tailors' in Sawan Park. The owner, Mr. Salahuddin, knew of a person called Panday who answered the descriptions given by the police, but he was not aware of his full name. The police then tried at another shop close by called the Kamal Cloth House. Here they were able to get the information they required. The full name of the murder victim was Dev Narain Pandey. He belonged to Faizabad but lived in Delhi where he worked at polishing mosaic floors. The investigation of the murder proceeded. More missing links were brought to light one after another. It was discovered that forty years ago, the murdered person had taken the life of a man to redress some personal grievance. One Mahendar Kumar Choudhery, a nephew of the murdered man, was brought up in an environment where he repeatedly heard that his uncle had been murdered by Pandey. He decided, therefore, that he himself should avenge his uncle's murder. To carry out his plan he came to Delhi and pretended to become friendly with Dev Narain Pandey. One day he got the opportunity he had been waiting for and lost no time in murdering him. The police finally took him into custody and he confessed. He found himself in this terrible position because his family could not bring themselves to forgive the murder even after the lapse of forty years. It is a sorry truth that in all societies people have some cause or the other for complaint against those with whom they come into contact. But retaliation is no solution to this problem. The solution lies rather in rising above such feelings of vengefulness. The deliberate overlooking of such matters can diminish the existing tensions, whereas retaliation and revenge only serve to aggravate the situation.

But it is no simple matter to stifle such feelings. Man can give up something only when he receives something greater in return. The feeling of a cause having been lost and justice not having been done can only be overcome by gaining some 'greater good'. The only such 'greater good' is the life of the hereafter. Faith in the next eternal world gives man this greater good, compared to which everything else is insignificant. That is why those who have discovered faith in the life hereafter will readily bear any other loss.

The Limits of Law

On August 26, 1978, two children, Sanjay, 15, and Gita, 17, were victims of a cold-blooded murder committed in the capital city of India, Delhi. The nation's conscience was aroused by this horrendous crime, and a massive manhunt was launched for the mindless killers. Finally two men, Jasbir Singh, alias Billa, 25, and Kuljit Singh, alias Ranga, 23, were arrested at Agra railway station, and charged with the murder of the two children. A lengthy court case followed, which ended with both men being condemned to death. A series of appeals followed, but all were turned down, and after their case had passed through all the various legal stages, both men were hanged, on January 31, 1982 in Delhi's Tihar Jail.

It was Additional Session Judge M.K. Chawla who delivered the sentence of death. His five-page verdict contained this sentence: "The ends of justice would be met only if the two accused were put to eternal sleep, thereby allowing others to live in peace."

The words of the judge give an apt illustration of the limits of human law. All that human law is able to do is separate criminals from the rest of society; it is not capable of delivering the punishment which they deserve. To take an innocent life is such a ghastly crime that there is no worldly punishment that can atone for it. A judge in a human court of law cannot punish a murderer in a manner comparable to his crime. He can only prevent those with criminal and homicidal tendencies from causing further harm to human society.

The limitations of this world necessitate the coming of another, unlimited world, which will make up for the shortcomings of this world. Without the hereafter, this world is incomplete. Here a judge can only separate a criminal from potential victims. This is done with a view to maintaining the smooth running of human society. It does not amount to justice. In the next world, justice will be done. Everyone will receive the punishment which they deserve. There the punishment will fit the crime, which it can never do in this world.

8 January 1985

Life's Labours are Never Lost

Iana Devangaddy of Bangalore was a student at Cambridge when Jawahar Lal Nehru went to study there. He developed a close association with Nehru. It was because of this relationship that his son, Deren Angaddy, heard a lot about Nehru during his childhood. Impressed with his personality, Deren used to impersonate him. Later Deren became a film actor.

When Attenborough planned to produce a film on Gandhi, with an investment of Rs. 25 Crores (about \$ 25 m). Deren was selected to play the role of Nehru. However, after six months he was told by the film producers that he was being dropped from the list of actors and that Roshan Seth had been chosen to play this role instead. This decision was made six months after Deren Angaddy had been offered the role, during which time he had worked hard to perfect his role. The news shocked him to the point where he committed suicide.

Why did Deren Angaddy take such a drastic step? Was it because he had worked hard to develop an ability which had no further use? Seemingly this had plunged him into a depression so deep that he took his life.

People tend to overlook the fact that professional skill and ability achieved by hard struggle is an investment in itself. Even if they fail to find an immediate outlet, life's labours are never lost in the long run. Sooner or later opportunities are bound to present themselves to draw on such painfully acquired skills.

8 January 1985

Commercialization of religion

According to the English writer Evelyn Waugh (1902-1966): “American manufactures of ‘religious goods’ offer many ingenious novelties, including a ‘rosary aid’ which records each ‘Ave’ on a dial with a sharp click, and a plastic crucifix which, I was assured, had the advantage that you could throw it on the ground and stamp on it.” (The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh.)

In recent years ‘Tasbeeh aids’, manufactured in Japan, which perform the same function as ‘rosary aids’, have become available in many parts of the Muslim world.

Where Does it All End?

In ancient times, when man discovered the saw and axe and, using these tools, was able to fashion a wheel from wood, this was considered the ultimate in human progress. History showed, however, that it was just the beginning. When the industrial revolution ushered in the technological age, man started to fashion hard metals into new and wondrous forms. Once again it was thought that this was as far as he could go.

But it was not. The coming of the space-age showed that there is a higher degree of perfection, made possible by space technology, which had previously eluded man. In the industrial age, for instance, goods were manufactured on earth. The pollution and density of the earth's atmosphere, however, was not conducive to the production of certain goods, such as highly sensitive medicines. Now, with what Dr James Beggs, administrator of NASA, calls the "extraordinary success" of the US space shuttle experiments, plans are afoot for "space manufacturing", or putting factories into orbit. The first such factory, as the *Hindustan Times* reported on March 31, 1984, aimed at producing medicines of a quality and purity that would be impossible on the earth's surface, is to be launched in 1986. The report continues:

"The secret of the likely success of space manufacturing lies partly in weightlessness. Because of the downward pull of gravity, it is impossible on the earth's surface to produce anything perfectly round and perfectly pure."

The space-age, then, has brought in a new standard of perfection, one that lies in weightlessness rather than in the density of the atmosphere in which we live. With every new advance in technology a new, previously unimaginable, degree of perfection emerges. This seemingly unending sequence of advances makes it easy for us to understand the nature of Paradise. Paradise is where perfection reaches its ultimate stage. If progress in the limits of perfection is possible in the human world, then there is no reason why a further, supreme degree of perfection should not be possible in the world of God. There appears to be no limit to the progress which man can achieve in this world: whenever one stage is reached, another lies in wait. But when man enters the world of God, perfection will reach a supreme and unsurpassable stage, for "to the Lord is the final goal." (Quran, 53: 42)

Looking Out Into Space

If one were able to observe the entire universe from a distance, one would be struck dumb with wonder at this unique phenomenon. To one's great amazement, one would find unfathomable space, blazing stars and dry rocks flying at a great speed in the vast universe. The only exception in this inconceivable vast space is our small planet, called earth. In the whole universe known to us, the earth is the only living planet; where there is water, greenery and life, where the process of their conversion is at work, where man has been endowed with the unique ability to see, think and plan, the rarest phenomenon in the universe.

The very fact of settling man on such an exceptional world indicates that God wants to bestow on him some gift of an exceptional nature. That is, to create a unique world in the universe that will be called heaven, in which all forms of pleasure will be brought together. The world will be free of all disadvantages and limitations, an everlasting manifestation of God's perfection.

Now the question arises, who are those fortunate souls worthy of such special treatment by God? The present world provides us with the answer: The present world is a model of the heavenly world, the world of God's choice. The perfect world of heaven will be inhabited by those souls who are blissfully free of worldly considerations, who can lead their lives like a green tree which bears its fruit and spreads its branches to give shade to friends and foes alike. Heaven is for those who can sing, like birds, the praises of their Lord, even when He remains invisible. It is for those who can derive sustenance from the manifestations of the Lord in nature.

Such souls alone are fit to preach the word of God. God's silent message has never ceased to be relayed throughout the universe; the true preacher of God, his mind being attuned to this divine communication becomes a recipient of this divine message. He can then join in chorus with the birds and trees who are perpetually singing hymns to God. A preacher has to rise above this mundane world. People who are lost in trivial issues can never be fit to communicate His exalted message. It is even more important that a preacher should attain to a higher moral standard than his listeners. Without this, he is not worthy to communicate the message of God.

Can Artificial Intelligence be a Substitute for the Human Brain?

The United States and Japan have been working on the plan of producing fifth generation computers. It is believed that these sets of computers will be able to see, talk and think. The U.S. defense department has immediately released 600 million dollars to the companies who are carrying out this research. The Government of Japan has followed suit.

At the moment, the latest model of computers can perform 500 million operations in one second. It is estimated that by 1986, computers will be available which will be able to perform a billion operations per second. Yet the Pentagon is not satisfied with this anticipated increase in speed. Its target is to produce computers which operate at the rate of 1000 billion per second.

The computers designed in human forms are called robots. They can move their arms up and down, they can move their bodies left and right at the command of the operator, provided the operator directs in the same language which has already been fed into the computer.

The attempts to develop mechanical observation power in computers are under way. It is hoped that they will be able to study structural designs in order to identify enemy planes and will consequently be able to strike them down.

However, the term “artificial ‘intelligence” which is used in computer science, is misleading. It is often taken to mean that artificial intelligence can serve as a substitute for natural intelligence. This is quite illusory. There is little difference between a tape recorder’s artificial speech and a computer’s artificial intelligence. Both are capable only of operating in terms of their programming. The difference is simply the degree of complexity. An expert in computer science has put this in the following words:

“It is impossible to develop an artificial intelligence as it is understood literally, it is impossible in principle. The human brain is a very sophisticated system composed of tens of billions of interconnected cells. Each cell is extremely complex in itself. A rather plausible hypothesis says that an individual cell processes the signals penetrating it like a computer. Therefore, even the most sophisticated machine we may imagine can not even be compared to the brain. (*The Times of India*, November 9, 1983)

No matter how sophisticated computers become, they can never oust the human brain from its central position in human affairs. At best, they can act as aids to and extensions of the human intelligence. We must bear in mind that while such machines are created by man, the human brain is the creation of God.

Cutting Man to Size

On April 8, 1984, squadron, Leader Rakesh Sharma, the first Indian spaceman, gave an interview from space which, relayed from the mission control centre in Moscow, was telecast live on the national Indian TV network. Part of the conversation went like this:

Question: How do you pass your time when there is no work?

Sharma: I just peep through the window and 'watch the timeless space.

Question: Don't you feel like a tiny human being up there, dwarfed by the endless space?

Sharma: Certainly, it's mind boggling.

Humility is the greatest quality that man can have, and arrogance is undoubtedly the worst. Humility is the result of realistic thinking; for it is a fact that man is an extremely small and insignificant part of an extremely vast and fathomless universe. Arrogance, on the other hand, is the result of superfluous thinking, for when one thinks of the tiny place one occupies in the universe as a whole, there can be no room for arrogance.

Thinking of oneself in relation to other men might lead to arrogance, for it is possible that one will be better off than them; one might hold a higher status in life. But when one thinks of oneself in relation to the vast universe arrogance disappears, for one sees how small and insignificant one is. God has created the universe so that we may observe and ponder over it; so that realization of its greatness may lead us to a realization of what a small part we ourselves occupy in it; so that we may be imbued with the quality of humility, which is the greatest and most realistic quality that man can have.

What causes more trouble in the world, the things forgotten which should have been remembered or the things remembered which should have been forgotten.

Displaying an Iron Will

There is a verse in the Quran which makes mention of iron. It is this word - "iron" - after which the entire chapter is named:

"We have sent our apostles with clear signs and brought down with them scriptures and the scales of justice, so that men might deal with, fairness. We have sent down iron, with its mighty strength and diverse uses for mankind, so that God may know those who support Him, though unseen, and support His apostles. Powerful is God, and Mighty." (57:25)

God has created the material world in such a way that it serves as an ethical model for man. In this verse two things from the material world – scales and iron – have been mentioned, for they both contain attributes that man too is required to adopt.

Scales tell us the weight of things. If we want to know how heavy something is, then we weigh it up on a pair of scales. Only then can we tell if it is as heavy as it should be, whether it is up to the required weight. God's Scriptures are also scales, but in an ethical rather than material sense: they are used for weighing actions rather than things. By weighing up our actions on the scales of the divine scriptures we can tell whether they are right or wrong. One who wishes to be successful in the next world should ensure that his words and actions in this world are up to the required weight, for if they are not, he is doomed to failure in the hereafter.

The second object mentioned in this verse is iron. Iron, has certain properties that should also be adopted by man. It is a reliable metal, a basis of strength and firmness. Any bridge or construction founded on iron can be depended upon to fully withstand the force of storms and gales. It is men and women of this nature who are required for service of the divine cause on earth. So taxing is this task that it can only be performed by people endowed with an iron will: people who display no weakness even when faced with severe difficulties; ones who remain as rigid as steel under the pressure of the inward and outward enemies who rise to thwart one in this task.

13 January 1985

Muslims should not fight among themselves

The Prophet Mohammad said: "One who fights against us is not of our number."

Becoming Accustomed to a New World

On November 18, 1984 a host of giraffes from Kenya were transported by aeroplane to the United States. Surviving members of a particularly long-necked species of giraffe, they were being taken to the United States for breeding. The journey in the aeroplane presented a problem for the organizers; for the giraffes had never heard the loud noise of jet engines before, and it was thought that they may become alarmed when placed in an aircraft for the first time. In order to make them accustomed to the sound which they would have to experience during the long flight from Kenya to the United States, the giraffes were exposed to tape-recordings of the sound of jet engines for several weeks before their departure. When they finally set foot on the aircraft the sound was nothing new to them, and they showed no adverse reactions when the engines were switched on. (*BBC News*, November 18, 1984)

Any animal or human being experiences a certain shock on stepping into a new environment. If one has been accustomed to a certain set of conditions for years, then any change in these conditions will have an inevitable effect on one's general disposition. When human beings are subjected to such a change in their environment the impact it has on them is known as "culture shock". To avoid suffering from the effects of culture shock, humans go through a period of preparation - much like that the giraffes underwent - before switching to a new environment. They read books on the country they are going to visit; they learn its language and acquaint themselves with the habits and customs of its people, which may be very different from their own. Only then will they be in a position to enjoy the pleasures that it has to offer.

All men are destined to leave this world. The journey they will undertake after death will be more momentous than any they have undertaken in their lives. The conditions of the next world will be entirely different from those they have experienced on earth. In this world people succeed by all sorts of underhand means; in the next world there will be only one basis of success, and that will be the real worth of one's own actions. In this world it is often injustice that holds sway; the next world will be one of total and perfect justice. In this world man can excuse himself by casting a camouflage of words upon his actions; in the next world empty words will have no weight. Only those words that are supported by reality will ring true.

Before switching to this totally different world man needs to become accustomed to it. For this reason God sends His prophets to teach man the conditions that will prevail in the eternal world for which he is bound. He reveals His scriptures to enable man to prepare himself for the next world, and adopt its conditions before he gets there. If man fails to take heed of these warnings, however, then he will reach the next world unprepared; he will be exposed to such massive shock that he will not be fit to enjoy the untold blessings that lie there.

Divine Qualities

Paradise is an ideal world, specially prepared by God. The present world is one of toil and struggle, whereas the next world will be one of joy and bliss. The present world is for the selection of those souls who will be fit to inherit life everlasting.

The next world will be one of eternal honour and happiness. Such a world can only be inhabited by those who have adopted divine qualities. We do not have to look far to see what these divine qualities consist of: they are fully exemplified in the world around us.

It will be those whose hearts and minds are as lofty as the mountains and as deep as the seas who will be fit to enter paradise. Those who do not obstruct others, but pass through their midst like the winds blowing through a forest; who pursue a silent course through life, like stars moving across the sky; who show no prejudice towards others, but shine like the sun on friend and foe alike; who do not thrive on fame and prestige, but blossom selflessly like the flowers; who are benevolent and compassionate towards others, like a rivers which forges a course for itself through the land, benefiting those who live on its banks; who derive spiritual nourishment from the whole world, like trees which are sustained by earth, water, fire and air; who are free of pride and arrogance, casting themselves before the Lord like shadows lying prostrate upon the ground.

God has made the universe a model of His own qualities. It is those who make those qualities their own who will be fit to inhabit God's ideal world in the hereafter.

Rancour: The Cause of Failure

Zafar Iqbal has been playing hockey for India since 1976-1977, and is at present captain of the national team. He has led his team of a host of trophies, including the 1980 Olympic gold, and is at present recognized as the best outside-left in the game. According to Vijay Lokapally of the Patriot newspaper, the secret of Zafar Iqbal's success is that he concentrates on his game at all costs, and does not retaliate to fouls by his opponents. Neither does he harbour any rancour against anyone. Zafar Iqbal explains this-his most vital and telling tactic – by saying: "The day I do so, I would cease to be a sportsman."

What, in Zafar Iqbal's words, is true of sportsmen, is also true of the whole human race. Anyone who bases his life on a policy of retaliation, and harbours rancour against his fellow human beings, cannot be called a true man. Man, in the real sense of the word, is a being who has a purpose in life and who keeps struggling to achieve that purpose regardless of the treatment inflicted on him by others.

It is unfortunate that this fact, which has been realized on both an intellectual and practical level by a great Muslim "sportsman", has been totally ignored by great Muslim "men" of the modern age. Muslim leaders in recent times have all conducted a policy aimed at redressing the "wrongs" inflicted on them by their oppressors. In so doing, they have failed in the main purpose of the Muslim community, which is propagation of the word of God.

Just as success on the sportsfield lies in avoiding minor disputes with one's opponents and concentrating on winning the game, so success in the field of life in general lies in putting trivial issues and quarrels to one side and devoting oneself wholeheartedly to one's central task. The result will not only be success in the purpose of life, but the side-issues which might have distracted one's attention will also recede into insignificance, or be settled to one's own advantage.

Zafar Iqbal is serious about executing his duties as a player and captain. He really wants his team to succeed. That is why he has realized the key to success, and put it into play on the field. If the Muslims are really serious about discharging their responsibilities, both as human beings and as Muslims, then they will also take Zafar Iqbal's lead and cast all irrelevant issues and disputes to one side in their determination to succeed.

Part I, Chapter IV

Mohammad: The Prophet of Islam

Sublime Character

In the Quran the Prophet Mohammad is described as being of “sublime character.” (68: 5). Here are two sayings of the Prophet which throw light on what this “sublime character” consists of:

“Never debase your character by saying that if people treat you well, you will treat them well, and if they harm you, then you will do worse to them. Rather, become accustomed to being good to those who are good to you, and not wronging those who harm you.” (*Mishkat-ul-Masabih*)

“Join hands with those: who break away from you, forgive those who wrong you, and be good to those who harm you.”

The sublime character described here was displayed – in its most lofty form – by the Prophet himself. Such character is required of ordinary Muslims as an accessory, but with the Prophet it was a basic requisite. This is clear from this statement of the Prophet:

“Nine things the Lord has commanded me: Fear of God in private and in public; Justness, both in anger and in calmness; Moderation in both poverty and affluence; that I should join hands with those who break away from me; and give to those who deprive me; and forgive those who wrong me; and that my silence should be meditation; and my words remembrance of God; and my vision keen observation.” (Razin)

There are two levels of character, an ordinary and a superior level. An ordinary character is based on the principle: do as you have been done by. Such a character might be termed a “knee-jerk character”, for one possessed of such a character offers only reflex responses to treatment by others, breaking with those who break with him, wronging those who wrong him, and harming those who harm him.

But the higher level of character is based on the principle: do as you would be done by. One possessed of such a character deals with both friend and foe in the same principled manner, irrespective of how he himself has been treated. He is reconciliatory, even joining with those who break with him. He is compassionate, even to those who seek to harm him. He is forbearing, even towards those who wrong him.

According to the French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778), “No one is a hero to his valet. “ The reason for this is that a valet has access to a person’s private life, and in private life no one is perfect. Those close to a person usually do not hold him in such high esteem as those who are further off. That

is why they cannot come to think of him as a hero. But, as Soren Smith has written, this does not hold true for the Prophet of Islam. History shows that the closer one came to him, the more one was taken by his fine qualities.

Zaid Ibn Haritha was the son of Haritha Ibn Sharaheel, a member of the tribe of Kalb. His mother's name was Suda Bint Tha'alaba. She belonged to a branch of the Tai tribe called Bani Ma'an. When Zaid was eight year old, his mother took him to her father's home. There, some members of the tribe of Bani Qayn Ibn Jasn attacked their camp. Amongst the booty that they plundered was the young Zaid. They then took him to the Ukkaz fair and sold him. The buyer's name was Hakim Ibn Hazam, a nephew of Khadija, who was later to become the Prophet's wife. He brought the child to Mecca and presented him to his aunt as a slave. When the Prophet married Khadija, she placed Zaid in his service. The boy's father and uncle soon learnt of his whereabouts. They came to Mecca to recover him, and take him home with them. They met the Prophet, and said that they would give any compensation that he required, so long as he returned the child to them. The Prophet said that he did not want any compensation; if Zaid wanted to go with them, they could take him. He called Zaid, and asked him if he knew these people. Zaid said that he did: they were his father and uncle. "They want to take you with them," The Prophet said. "If you want, you can go home with them." "I won't leave you to go anywhere," Zaid replied. His father and uncle were incensed on hearing this. "What, do you prefer slavery to freedom?" they asked. "Do you want to forsake your own folk, and live amongst others?" "I cannot prefer anyone to Mohammad," Zaid replied, "not after seeing the qualities that he has." His father and uncle then returned to their home.

This incident occurred before the commencement of the Prophet's mission. It reveals the tenderness that was inherent in his nature. The Quran has referred to this characteristic in the following words:

"It was thanks to God's mercy that you were lenient to them. Had you been cruel and hard-hearted, they would surely have deserted you." (3:159)

It was this magnanimity of the Prophet that gave him the power to capture people's hearts: the closer one came to him, the more one would be won over by his noble character.

What a terrible time it must have been when, as night was falling, the urchins of Taif were chasing the Prophet out of town and pelting him with stones. This was the place where the Hijaz aristocracy used to while away their summer days. The Prophet had made the fifty mile trip from Mecca to call them to Islam. But the lords of Taif did not listen to his well-meaning words; instead they set the street-urchins on him, and they kept on chasing him until night had cast a veil between them and God's Prophet. His body was covered in wounds. Bleeding from head to foot and utterly exhausted, he took refuge in a vineyard. This was a traumatic experience for any man to bear. The Prophet once told his wife, Aisha, that it was the hardest night of his life. But, at this gravest of moments, the Prophet did not wish his enemies any harm. All he said was: "Lord, guide them, for they know not what they do." Such was the noble character of the Prophet, and it was this nobleness which finally subdued his opponents and brought the whole of Arabia within the Islamic fold. The force of his sublime spirit was enough to

conquer all in its wake. No prejudice, antagonism or contumacy could withstand the magical power of good that was embodied in his person.

The Prophet once said: "Honouring ties of relationship does not mean honouring your ties with those who honour their ties with you; it means honouring your ties with those who sever their ties with you." The well-known case of the accusation of adultery against Aisha wife of the Prophet and daughter of Abu Bakr - provides apt illustration of this principle.

This accusation - brought against Aisha when she was left behind while returning from the expedition to Bani Mustalaq (6AH), then rescued by a young companion of the Prophet by the name of Safwan Ibn Mu'attal - was absolutely slanderous. Indeed, the episode has become famous in Islamic history as the "case of the slander." One of the persons responsible for its fabrication and propagation was a relative of Abu Bakr named Mistah. When Abu Bakr learnt that Mistah was one of those who had defamed his innocent daughter, he cut off the allowance that he used to grant Mastah as a needy relative. When Abu Bakr took this step, God revealed this verse of the Quran to His Prophet:

"Let not the honourable and rich among you swear not to give to their kindred, the poor and those who have fled their homes for the cause of God. Rather, let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish God to forgive you? He is Forgiving, Merciful." (24: 22)

That is, a person who is in need should not be denied financial assistance because of his misconduct. Rather one should pardon him and continue to help him.

A man came up and insulted Abu Bakr one day when he was sitting with the Prophet. Abu Bakr listened and was silent. The man continued to abuse him. Again Abu Bakr held his peace. When the man kept on repeating his foul language, Abu Bakr could contain himself no longer, and answered back. On hearing this, the Prophet immediately got up and left. "Why have you left your place, Prophet of God?" Abu Bakr enquired. "As long as you remained silent, Abu Bakr," the Prophet replied, "God's angel was answering for you. But as soon as you burst out, the angel left." Thus the Prophet illustrated that God requites one for any wrong done to one, as long as one does not take retaliatory measures of one's own. But God leaves the matter to one who seeks revenge. Obviously a requital will be more complete if it is left to God.

The Prophet once borrowed some money from a Jewish scholar. After a few days the Jew came to demand payment of his debt. "At the moment, I have nothing to pay you with," the Prophet told him. "I won't let you go until you have paid me back," the Jew retorted. And so he stayed there, from morning until night, holding the Prophet captive. At this time the Prophet was the established ruler of Medina: he had the power to take measures against the Jew. His companions, indeed, wanted to rebuke the man and chase him away. But the Prophet forbade them from taking any action. "A Jew is holding you captive," protested one of them, "True," the Prophet replied, "but the Lord has forbidden to wrong anyone." Night turned to morning. With the light of dawn, the Jew's eyes opened. He was profoundly moved on seeing the Prophet's tolerance, notwithstanding his power to take action, and embraced Islam. This Jew

was a rich man. The day before, he had detained the Prophet on account of a few pence; but the Prophet's noble conduct had such an impact on him that now he was willing to give all his wealth to the Prophet, saying, "Spend it as you please."

Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma once made a transaction with the Prophet. It had not yet been completed when Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma had to go home on some urgent business. "Wait here," he said to the Prophet. "We'll settle this affair when I come back from my home." When he reached home, he became so engrossed in certain tasks that he forgot his promise. He remembered it after three days and went back to that place. He found the Prophet waiting there. All he said to Abdullah Ibn Abi Al-Hasma was: "You have given me a lot of trouble; I have been waiting here for three days." There is a magnetic power in conduct such as this which even the most stubborn person cannot resist.

21 January 1985

How family commitments can be a distraction from life's goal

Arthur Miller is one of the greatest, and most prolific, of post-war American playwrights. Since his first play '*All My Sons*' came out in 1947, he has consistently been writing and producing highly successful plays. His magnum opus '*Death of a Salesman*' is a set-study in schools and universities throughout the world, a rare privilege for a playwright in his own lifetime. In 1956, he married the film star Marilyn Monroe and became world-famous overnight. Their marriage was hailed as a perfect match – a “meeting of brains and beauty.” For the five years that he was married to her he did not write a single play. “It was all I could do to take care of her,” he once explained.

Arthur Miller interviewed by David Richards, *The Washington Post*

21 January 1985

“...And He has placed mountains in the earth so that it should not shake with you...” (Qur'an, 31:10)

How is it that the earth, which rests on a deep layer of very hot fluid, is firm beneath our feet? Modern geological data has confirmed, as the Quran revealed many centuries ago, that mountains are the cause of this stability. With the development of folds that were to form mountain ranges, the earth's crust was driven sufficiently far down in the sub-strata for it to have a foundation in the porous layers that underlie it.

(The Bible, the Quran and Science. by Dr. Maurice Bucaille, P 180-182.)

Going Places on Home Ground

Paul Dirac, who died in November 1984, was known to the world as the developer of the mathematics of the quantum mechanical theory – in effect the physics of the smallest part of the atom. He received his initial education, however, not in the field of mathematics, but in that of electrical engineering. Though he obtained a first-class degree at the Merchant Venturers Technical College, he did not excel in this subject. As J.G. Crowther wrote in his obituary: “His teachers did not consider him a genius.” (*The Muslim*, Islamabad, November 23, 1984).

It was only when he entered the mathematics department of Bristol University, and then went on to St. John's College to continue his studies in the same field, that “it was perceived that he had extraordinary intellectual powers.”

In the field of mathematics, Dirac was on home-ground. His success as a physical mathematician was phenomenal. Following Werner Heisenberg's publication of the idea of a new quantum mechanics in 1925, Dirac independently went to work on creating an appropriate new mathematics for handling it. The result was his p-q number theory, completed in 1928, a “highly original and extremely elegant mathematical technique” in which “he showed how the theories of quantum mechanics and relativity could be combined.” In 1930 he published his textbook of quantum mechanics, which immediately became a classic. In 1932, at the incredibly early age of 30, he was appointed Lucasian Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge University, the chair Sir Isaac Newton had once occupied – a fitting post for one whom Niel Bohr called “the most remarkable scientific mind since Newton.”

Dirac was not successful in electrical engineering, but when he entered his own domain – mathematics – he thrived and showed amazingly innovative genius. Like Dirac, everyone has a domain of his own in which he can excel. Failure in one field is no reason to lose hope: there is always another field awaiting one, in which the flower of one's destiny can flourish and thrive.

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Theological arguments bring good works to nothing

Awam Ibn Haushab said: "Be careful not to engage in theological arguments, for they destroy one's actions."

This is Where We are Bound

The Prophet Mohammad, may peace be upon him, initially forbade his followers from visiting graves. The Muslims had only recently shaken off the pre-Islamic customs of idol-worship and if they were to go to graves old customs might have found new expression in undue veneration at gravesides. The real purpose in visiting graves might have been lost on them. When the Prophet finally lifted the prohibition, he defined in clear terms exactly why they should do so: "Visit graves," he said, "for they remind one of death." (Sahih Muslim)

Just as visiting graveyards is meant to remind one that this is the destination of every person, so the act of burial in Islam is designed to remind the living that each one of them will one day be undergoing the same process. For this purpose the death ceremony has been made a live, poignant event, one which those who are living will be able to relate to themselves, one which will make them realize that the very same thing can, and will, happen to them.

First the dead body is washed, then covered in a shroud. The funeral prayer is then recited over it, and it is carried on people's shoulders to the place of burial, where with deference it is laid to rest.

Why has Islam taught one to treat the dead with such respect? Is it not true that the body is no more than dust after death? Why is it not treated as such, and disposed of in any old manner? Why is it handled as if it were a live, sensate being, and not as the dead body with no feeling that it is? These questions can only be answered when one realizes the purpose behind all Islamic injunctions related to death: they are meant as a lesson to the living. It is not for the sake of the dead that they are treated with such respect; it is for the sake of the living. The dead are treated as if they are alive so that the living can see themselves in the position of those who have passed away; so that they can experience death before it comes.

The same thing could have been done with a human effigy; but when performed with a real human being it becomes a lesson of real importance to others. Here is a person who was alive like anyone of us. Suddenly his feet halted in their stride, his tongue froze into silence, his vision faded into darkness; the worth attached to a live human being was attached to him no more. The same will happen to every living person. When one sees how it has happened to one who was alive like oneself, then one can easily see it happening to oneself.

The climax of the event is when one places earth on the grave. One does this three times: "from the earth We have created you," one says the first time; "and to the earth We will restore you," as one places earth a second time; and finally "and from it We will bring you back to life." (Quran, 20:55) So ends a life. The person concerned is no more, but the event is a very real one. Thus the living are shown what they are in reality, and where they are bound.